

Program 3

Historical References in the Arts

Description

How does art history inform and influence contemporary works of art? How do individual art forms impact or inform each other in a multi-arts work?

In this program, you will explore the concept of historical context. You will learn to recognize the use of historical references in a work of art, investigate the many ways that historical references can affect a work of art, interpret and use historical references to convey important information, and see how art continues to shape history today.

The program includes four lessons, in which Learner Teams and students:

- examine the multi-arts performance piece *Quidam* to identify historical references and consider their impact on the work,
- discover the power of costumes to evoke specific times and places,
- explore the lives and times of two artists from the past to see how their work affects artists today, and
- investigate traditional forms of street performances and determine whether or not they are “art.”

After viewing this program, you will design and construct your own costume elements to portray characters from *Where the Wild Things Are*, a children’s book by Maurice Sendak.

Learning Objectives

- Describe where historical references occur in a video segment from *Quidam*.
- Analyze costume designs for *Parade*, focusing on how they convey character and dictate movement. Create a costume element and explore how that costumes affects character development and movement.
- Analyze and interpret works of painter René Magritte and choreographer Alwin Nikolais, comparing the artists’ works to *Quidam*. Create a movement sequence that incorporates an original prop/costume element and references to Magritte and Nikolais.
- Conduct research into the history of street performance and how its influence is felt in Cirque du Soleil’s *Quidam*. Take on the role of an art historian discussing a specific type of street performance.

Guiding Questions

The following are questions for your group to consider as you work through the session.

- What are historical references?
- How do historical references affect the creation of new works of art?

Key Concepts/Vocabulary

- *Costume*: clothes or accessories worn to look like someone else, to evoke a specific time or place, or to fit in with a group or occasion
- *Fantasy*: a creation of the imagination; unlikely to exist in real life
- *Historical precedent*: a previous act, event, convention, or custom
- *Reality*: something that exists or could exist in real life
- *Street performers*: entertainers who perform in public areas, including musicians, mimes, magicians, puppeteers, dancers, acrobats, and daredevils
- *Surrealism*: an early- and mid-20th century movement in the arts that explored the subconscious to create fantastic imagery; an example is juxtaposing recognizable objects with things that seem to be the opposite (contrast)
- *Symbol*: something that represents something else by association, resemblance, or convention, especially a material object used to represent something invisible

Workshop Session (On-Site)

Materials and Resources

- Videotape or broadcast of Program 3—Historical References in the Arts
- *Quidam* video by Cirque du Soleil, available at your library and video rental store or for purchase at <http://store.yahoo.com/cirquestore/video1.html> or other online video sellers
- Costume design materials, such as fabric pieces, colored paper, ribbons, feathers, and pipe cleaners
- Handout: Criticism: Purposes and Process (from Program 2)
- Handout: Summary of Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*
- Reading: Cirque du Soleil (from Program 1)
- Reading: *Quidam* (from Program 1)
- Reading: Costumes Used in Program 3
- Reading: Alwin Nikolais
- Reading: René Magritte
- Reading: Role-Play
- Reading: Surrealism

Handouts and readings are available in the Appendix of this guide or on the workshop Web site.

Optional: Extended Session

Like all of the activities described in this guide, the activities described below are designed to guide participants in a two-hour workshop session. For a more in-depth experience of Program 3, explore the alternative Extended Session featured on the workshop Web site at www.learner.org/channel/workshops/artsineveryclassroom. This four-hour session includes expanded on-site activities that will enhance your understanding of the material presented in the workshop.

Facilitator: If you have elected to explore the Extended Session featured on the workshop Web site, do so now. Refer to the Web site for required materials, handouts, and instructions.

Getting Ready (20 minutes)

Discuss your experiences with having your students write critiques.

- What knowledge base was necessary for your students to succeed?
- How did your students work together?
- With what kinds of vocabulary did your students need the most help?

Facilitator: Distribute the handout, Criticism: Purposes and Process.

Discuss the following questions.

- How does art history inform and influence contemporary works of art?
- How do individual art forms affect or inform each other in a multi-arts work?

Workshop Session (On-Site), cont'd.

Facilitator: If you have a videotape of Cirque du Soleil's *Quidam*, use it to provide examples of historical references. Cue the program tape by setting the time counter in your videocassette player to 0:00 when you see the title "Quidam" at the beginning of the performance, then running the tape fast-forward to 9:50. Play the segment of *Quidam* that runs from 9:50 to 18:50 on the time counter (running time approximately nine minutes). The section to be viewed begins with a team of female acrobats performing with yo-yos. It continues with a transition in which Zoe swings and the father walks through the air; an aerial performer works on a suspended red fabric streamer; and a clown runs with sparklers. When a clown enters with a hula-hoop, stop the tape.

In the videotape, look for specific examples of:

- where art history influenced the performance and
- where individual art forms affected or informed each other in the performance.

Watch the Workshop Program (60 minutes)

View Program 3—Historical References in the Arts.

As you watch the program, consider the following focus questions.

Lesson 1: Influences of the Past

- What historical references might have influenced *Quidam*?
- What role does history play in the ideas that artists have?

Lesson 2: The Power of Costume

- What do costumes symbolize or represent in various works of art?
- How is a costume a work of art?

Lesson 3: Magritte and Nikolais

- How might biographical information about an artist inform our understanding of his or her works?
- How could the work of one artist influence the work of other artists?

Lesson 4: Art Historian Role-Play

- What is street performance? Is it art?
- How does historical precedent affect our view of art today?
- What criteria should be used to identify and define works of art?

Workshop Session (On-Site), cont'd.

Suggested Activities and Discussion (40 minutes)

Costume Design (30 minutes)

Read the handout, Summary of Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*.

Using available materials, design and construct a simple costume piece that an actor might use to portray a "wild thing." The costume should support the way the character would move and should communicate the following things about the character:

- emotions
- personality traits
- locale
- gender
- historical period
- age
- occupation
- social status

Facilitator: Distribute the handout, Summary of Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*.

In preparation for sharing completed costume pieces with the group, reflect on the symbolic or literal nature of costume elements.

Share costume pieces with the entire group using the following focus questions.

- What are the similarities and differences among these pieces?
- Why might these similarities and differences exist?
- How have symbols been used to express character traits?
- What impact might particular materials, color choices, or construction techniques have on the designs and the way the characters can move?

Reflection (10 minutes)

- Why is an understanding of history informative in the creation and analysis of works of art?
- What opportunities do you have in your daily classroom routine to address important historical connections to learning?

Facilitator: Use the following questions to focus a closing discussion.

Between Sessions (On Your Own)

Homework Assignment

If possible, apply the ideas from this program in your own classroom. For example, ask your students to create costumes for familiar characters from history or literature that they currently are studying. Be sure to engage students in discussion about artistic elements and historical facts that influenced their choices.

Classroom footage in this program models a team approach in which classroom teachers and arts specialists work together. You may wish to try this approach in your own classroom.

You can find the complete lesson plans and handouts on the workshop Web site at www.learner.org/channel/workshops/artsineveryclassroom. Audio and video demonstration materials related to these lessons can be found on the Classroom Demonstration Materials videotape, which will be provided free to purchasers of the workshop tapes.

If you are able to apply these ideas in your classroom, please be prepared to respond to the following question at the next workshop session:

- How effective were your students in representing artistic and historical elements in their design choices?

If you are unable to explore these activities with your students at this time, think about how you could adapt this lesson for your classroom. Prepare a lesson plan in your journal.

Optional Activities

Other enrichment activities can boost your learning between workshop sessions. Consider the recommended activities below and choose those that best meet your needs. Time permitting, you might share what you find out before or after your next workshop session.

Watch some or all of these programs from *The Arts in Every Classroom: A Video Library, K–5*:

- Expanding the Role of the Arts Specialist
- Teaching Dance
- Teaching Music
- Teaching Theatre
- Teaching Visual Art
- Developing an Arts-Based Unit
- Working With Local Artists
- Bringing Artists to Your Community

Explore the literature of Maurice Sendak beyond *Where the Wild Things Are*.

Research resources on fantasy, symbolism, surrealism, and street performance at your school or public library or on the Web.

Attend a show by a museum, theatre, dance company, or orchestra in your community. Research the historical references that apply to the performance. If possible, share the experience with students in your classroom.

Between Sessions (On Your Own), cont'd.

Reading Assignment

To support your understanding of Program 3, review the following readings:

- Cirque du Soleil
- *Quidam*
- Costumes Used in Program 3
- Alwin Nikolais
- René Magritte
- Role-Play
- Surrealism

To prepare for Program 4, study the following additional reading:

- Orff Instrumentarium

These readings can be found in the Appendix of this guide or on the workshop Web site at www.learner.org/channel/workshops/artsineveryclassroom.

In addition, read the complete illustrated children's book *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak.

Notes
